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ABSTRACT

Individualized instruction in the teaching of communication skills to the beginning professional places emphasis on communication in the helping professions, but encourages skills to be used where applicable in personal relationships. Individualized instruction by the teacher is made possible through the use of cassette tapes turned in each week by students demonstrating specific communication skills as outlined in "Alive and Aware" by Nunnally, Miller and Wackerman, 1976. The instructor listens to each student's tape then tapes a personal response to the student's demonstration. Positive and/or negative feedback on particular communicating skills are thus possible. The individual response models an "I count, you count" stance, and is an effective way to personalize the relationship between student and instructor. The time of listening and responding to tapes and the mechanics of student taping are considered, but the opportunity for spontaneity and individual response which cassette tapes offer are worthwhile. (Author)

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INDIVIDUALIZING THE TEACHING OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO THE STUDENT PROFESSIONAL

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APPENDIX

1. Syllabus

2. Tape Instructions

3. Catalogue Copy

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INDIVIDUALIZING THE TEACHING OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO THE STUDENT PROFESSIONAL

The individualized instruction approach that I am here to share with you today is that which I used in our introductory course in the program - Child, Family and Community Services. This is a course entitled Communication Skills for the Helping Professional. The first day of class I am greeted by a great variety of students. They will be students interested in child care services; they will be all the students who have been accepted for student teaching in the elementary schools program; many will be agency personnel who have worked for 5 years with an associate degree and now are wanting to come back to school; some will be housewives in their 30's who have not been in college for 4 to 10 years and are now coming back to think through a new vocation for themselves; some of them will be very well tuned community college graduates; others of the community college graduates will be very naive, having come out of a small rural high school in Central Illinois, commuted to Lincoln Land Community College while living at home and now doing the same thing as they commute to Sangamon State University. Our University is an upper level University, Junior, Senior and Masters level. As you can see, there are many different kinds of students who take this course, and it is a required course that all students who graduate with a BA in Child, Family and Community Services must have. The special technique that I use is a bi-weekly tape assignment and this allows for the great variation in students and allows for a great variation for feedback. This is what I would like to share with you today.

To teach the interpersonal communication awareness I use the well known book, Alive and Aware, by Elan Nunnalley, Sharod and Daniel Wackman. Many of you were probably aware that now this is published by Inter-Personal Communications, formerly called the Minnesota Couples Communication Program. These are the men who received the NCFR Student Research Award several years ago and who are this year to receive the Acme Service Award for their outstanding contribution to marriage.

While the format of interpersonal communication as presented in Alive and Aware is based more on the intimate relationship basis, at the same time it provides excellent framework for a professional person to become aware of how they communicate, in a very non-threatening way. And it also provides the sophistication needed for people to develop a sense of confidence and competence in their own communications.

I acknowledge that several of our students have enough competency to proficiency the course and I allow them to do this. Some of our Junior Colleges have very thorough empathy laboratories for students to practice communicating and to practice listening. When I find students that are graduates of one of these programs, these students turn in an introductory tape, which I respond to. Then I invite them to role play a client/helper situation demonstrating their use of all their skills, similar to what I ask for, for a final tape for the rest of the class.

It is in this class, for the less experienced then, that the first awareness of the difference between being acceptive and reflective from being directive, usually occurs. Many students upon entering the program, have the feeling, "I want to help people by telling them what I know." And part of the learning that occurs in this course is the awareness that helping occurs by maintaining their "I count, you count" relationship. A major goal also is to integrate the communication skills into everyday living and, in addition, to being aware of the effect that they have on the helping relationship when they are used.

The tape experience is the part that I want to emphasize with you today. It has a very special kind of individualization. I give them a short syllabus, of which I have copies for you if you would like this, and every other week, students turn in a cassette tape with one of the skills on it. I then respond to what I have heard and right on the tape, tell them what my response is; what I heard that was good communication; what they said that showed me that they understood the concept of the skill useage; what was missing. This is a delightful kind of experience because

they can role play and at the same time they often reveal something about themselves. It personalizes the relationship that the students and I have and I can respond in that way. One student once said that it's like getting a letter from a penpal, only better, when there has been some kind of communication and they anticipate my response. Many bring their tape recorders to class and when the tapes are handed back, they listen to it right at the beginning of class so if there is a question about what I have said they can ask me there. Each student, in that way, feels that I am attuned to their needs.

The first tape assignment is only a self introduction tape. I ask that it be about two minutes long and the main purpose of this is to help them become aware of how to use the equipment, to get a little more comfortable with it, to check out volume, check out time, to really rate their awareness about how they communicate. It takes quite a bit to be able to get together two tapes, which is what I ask them to have available, a useable tape recorder and to remember to press the record button, to press the stop button. It gets the mechanics into a practice. As I respond to this I try to model the "I count/you count" stance. I share my pleasure in getting to know them. I can tell them what I heard sounded fine and give a very brief comment. Others may be much more personal. I try to respond mainly to the process but I respond to the content too. I am able to share some of myself in these situations. An example is Monic's tape (TAPE).

I listen and respond to all the tapes each week; then it will be two weeks later that they turn in their next skill. Hopefully, they keep all the skills on one tape; but it is not mandatory, if they are late or I am late in listening, they have a second tape to fulfill the requirement. If they show me in their skill that they understand the concept, I comment on this; if they don't, I comment on that and I give them an imcomplete until they are able to convey to me how they do know it. It is a requirement that all tapes must be turned in. In order to pass the course there

must be competency shown on at least six of them. The general advantage of this is that each person can use situations in which they live to learn the skills, making the learning more meaningful. A young mother often uses her family situations. Agency employees often role play office situations. One woman, a student working as a nursery school teacher who comes to school at night, demonstrates this on one of the tape assignments. She is to show the awareness of different styles of communication, after different skills are learned; the assignment is to take just one problem and use 4 different styles of communication, to deal with it. She demonstrates this effectively with another student (PLAY TAPE). There is immediate evaluation for the students and they greatly appreciate that. This feels very good to me too, as the following demonstrates (PLAY TAPE).

There are disadvantages to this; it does demand that I sit down and listen to their tapes and respond to them. It is a time consuming response that I must make. I acknowledge that I have been able to do this while traveling on an airplane or in a car. I have also learned that it takes a great deal of organizing to make this work. I have two classes doing this and for each class I have a large market bag type of container and then I have smaller bags inside that. I have told the class that if they are in the smaller bags, I have listened to them. If they are in the outer bag, I have not. This is working out quite well. At times I think my tape instructions make me sound like a rigid, rhetoric professor, but when I explain why to the students, they are very accommodating. I did learn that I had to be well structured in the kind of tape mechanic expectation if I were going to be able to keep my sanity and not to listen to lots of repeat messages.

At times I wonder if I am getting a total picture. One of the techniques a student can use is to rehearse and rehearse a specific skill so that it comes through on the tape just right for that time. What this does say to me is, that at

least there has been a great deal of awareness about it and a great deal of focusing on it. It is a beginning course and I acknowledge to myself that there will be more times to check on how integrated this skill learning has been, through the field work supervision process and other classroom experiences, before they graduate. Also, they have to fulfill a final skill demonstration.

Students enjoy it, I enjoy it, it is a good experience. One of the problems I have had is that as each student is so much into their own skill of learning they have not been terribly concerned about each other and I have taken steps this time, through organizing the class, to help foster the communicating between each other. As I start each session I ask them to get into groups of four and share communication experiences during the past week; if it worked, if it didn't work, if they felt good about it. They can share content if they want to, perhaps they want to role play a situation with a student to start over to see what they could have done differently.

There is one written assignment in the class and this is a paper having to do with their own communication learning. It may be doing a research apper on the use of different communication skills in different types of client/helper situations. It may be keeping a journal reflecting how they have used different skills, how they were received and how they felt about it.

On the whole, there is a lot of class enthusiasm for this learning. I am greatful to Wackman, Miller and Nunnalley for developing a teaching format so meaningful. I acknowledge I use a little bit of Tom Gordon's Parent Effectiveness Training concepts, primarily for amplification, but I encourage you too, to try this individualization technique. For a humanistic teacher who believes the teaching relationship is one of the most satisfying interpersonal relationships, it is a comfortable teaching strategy.